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ABSTRACT

Interest is invariably the source of successful learning. When people, of any age, want to learn, they learn. When they are preached at, lectured, put in settings where they fail and are made to feel stupid, they reject the whole system of education. To reverse that message, teachers of reading must use a variety of techniques such as providing students with a wide variety of life experiences, individualizing instruction, establishing reachable goals with sufficient rewards when the students meet those goals, providing students with a variety of reading materials, establishing friendly rules of classroom discipline, matching the reader with the text, and integrating reading with other language skills. The community can become involved through parent participation and contributions made by local industries and by visiting artists and scholars. For the students to graduate with specific work skills, reading in the upper grades should be coordinated with career education and even with work experience. At every level, from preschool through high school, educators must strive to make the reading program fit the aspirations and needs of students. (HOD)

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OAKLAND UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT
Office of the Superintendent

READING FROM A SUPERINTENDENT'S POINT OF VIEW

By
Ruth B. Love
Superintendent

READING HAS BEEN A LIFELONG INTEREST - EVEN A PASSION - FOR ME - FIRST, AS A CHILD WHO LOVED BOOKS - THEN AS AN EDUCATOR TRYING TO EVOKE AND NURTURE THAT SAME LOVE IN MY STUDENTS.

BUT UNTIL YESTERDAY, I NEVER REALLY KNEW WHAT READING COULD BE. IN THE ROYAL SHAKESPEARE COMPANY'S PERFORMANCE OF "HAMLET," I EXPERIENCED THE PERFECT MARRIAGE OF GIFTED READERS WITH A SUBLIME TEXT. THE ACTORS' "READING" REACHED MY MIND AND MY HEART. IT MADE ME THINK, FEEL AND EXULT IN SHEER JOY AT SUCH BEAUTY.

THAT PERFORMANCE SHOOK ME OUT OF MY ACCUSTOMED STANCE AS A READING "EXPERT" AND REMINDED ME THAT READING IS FAR MORE THAN A USEFUL SKILL - IT IS AN ART WHICH REQUIRES CREATIVITY, IMAGINATION - AND TALENT. EVEN A SHAKESPEAREAN PLAY, WITHOUT ABLE, SENSITIVE READERS, IS MERELY SYMBOLS ON PAPER.

OUR ROLE AS READING TEACHERS IS TO DEVELOP ARTFUL READERS WHO CAN BRING THEMSELVES TO THE PRINTED PAGE AS FULL AND ACTIVE PARTICIPANTS - WHO CAN ENTER INTO DIALOGUE WITH AN AUTHOR, CONTRIBUTING THEIR PERSONAL COMMENTARY TO THE TEXT.

FOR US TO DO LESS IS TO FAIL TO MEET THE CHALLENGE OF OUR PROFESSION, TO EDUCATE, TO BRING OUT WHAT HAMLET SPOKE OF AS "THE CAPABILITY AND GODLIKE REASON" WITHIN EACH OF OUR STUDENTS.

United Kingdom Reading Association-17th Annual Course and Conference
August 1, 1980 University of Warwick, England

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"WHAT IS MAN," HAMLET ASKS,
"IF HIS CHIEF GOOD AND MARKET OF HIS TIME
BE BUT TO SLEEP AND FEED? A BEAST, NO MORE.
SURE, HE THAT MADE US WITH SUCH LARGE DISCOURSE
LOOKING BEFORE AND AFTER, GAVE US NOT
THAT CAPABILITY AND GODLIKE REASON
TO FUST IN US UNUSED."

IT IS THAT QUESTION OF SHAKESPEARE'S AND ITS COROLLARY THAT I WOULD LIKE TO DISCUSS WITH YOU TODAY: WHAT CAN WE AS READING TEACHERS DO TO PREVENT "FUSTING," TO HELP OUR STUDENTS DEVELOP THEIR CAPACITY FOR "LARGE DISCOURSE" TO THE UTMOST?

BEFORE I CAN OFFER SOME OF MY OWN THOUGHTS ON THAT SUBJECT, I MUST TELL YOU A LITTLE ABOUT THE CONTEXT IN WHICH I WORK AND THINK.

OAKLAND CALIFORNIA'S PUBLIC SCHOOLS BEAR LITTLE RESEMBLANCE TO THE PLACES OF LEARNING THAT SHAKESPEARE KNEW. IN OUR SCHOOLS, THE MANDATE IS NOT, AS IT WAS IN SIXTEENTH CENTURY ENGLAND, TO EDUCATE A HEREDITARY ELITE. IT <u>IS</u> TO TEACH <u>ALL</u> CHILDREN IN OUR COMMUNITY TO READ, TO WRITE, TO COMPUTE, TO THINK, TO CREATE AND TO CONTRIBUTE TO SOCIETY AS FULLY AS THEY ARE ABLE.

THAT IS WHAT WE IN AMERICA CALL "A TALL ORDER" - PARTICULARLY WHEN YOU CONSIDER THE HARDSHIPS SOME OF THESE YOUNG PEOPLE BRING TO SCHOOL WITH THEM.

WE HAVE APPROXIMATELY 50,000 STUDENTS ENROLLED IN OUR REGULAR SYSTEM - WITH ANOTHER 10,000 IN PRE-SCHOOL AND ADULT SCHOOLS. THE VAST MAJORITY OF OUR STUDENT BODY - ABOUT 85 PERCENT - ARE FROM VARIOUS MINORITY GROUPS, INCLUDING NEARLY 70 PERCENT WHO ARE BLACK - AND A SIZABLE NUMBER OF IMMIGRANTS WHO SPEAK LITTLE OR NO ENGLISH.

THE OAKLAND SCHOOLS' BILINGUAL PROGRAM IS TAUGHT IN EIGHT DIFFERENT LANGUAGES AND ACCOMMODATES STUDENTS WHO SPEAK MORE THAN A DOZEN OTHERS!

TO FURTHER COMPLICATE A DIFFICULT SITUATION, 39 PERCENT OF OUR STUDENTS COME FROM FAMILIES RECEIVING SOME FORM OF GOVERNMENT WELFARE PAYMENTS - AN EXTRAORDINARILY HIGH PERCENTAGE OF PUPILS SUFFERING FROM ALL THE DEBILITATING EFFECTS OF POVERTY.

BEFORE WE CAN EVEN BEGIN TO TEACH READING, OR ANYTHING ELSE, WE MUST MEET SOME OF OUR STUDENTS' MUCH MORE URGENT NEEDS. SO, WE FEED FREE BREAKFASTS AND LUNCHES TO HUNDREDS OF STUDENTS, TEST THEIR VISION, HEARING AND GENERAL FITNESS, MAKE SURE THAT THEY HAVE BEEN INNOCULATED AGAINST SERIOUS DISEASES. SOME SCHOOL PRINCIPALS AND TEACHERS EVEN COLLECT CLOTHING FOR STUDENTS AND OFFER CLASSES TO TEACH PARENTS ABOUT NUTRITION AND HEALTH CARE.

AMONG OUR DEPRIVED CHILDREN - AS AMONG THE MIDDLE CLASS STUDENTS IN OUR SYSTEM - THERE ARE GIFTED CHILDREN WHO LEARN EASILY AND WELL, ALMOST BY THEMSELVES, BUT THERE ARE MANY WHO DO NOT, WHOSE NATURAL CURIOSITY AND ABILITY ARE ALREADY "FUSTING" BY THE TIME THEY ENROLL IN KINDERGARTEN.

THERE ARE SOME SO-CALLED SCIENTISTS WHO HAVE SUGGESTED THAT THESE CHILDREN LACK NATIVE INTELLIGENCE, BUT I KNOW THEY ARE WRONG - AS DOES ANYONE WHO HAS EVEN TAUGHT YOUNG CHILDREN IN A GHETTO SCHOOL.

THESE YOUNGSTERS ARE AS BRIGHT AS NEW PENNIES - SOMETIMES UNDER THE TARNISH OF NEGLECT - BUT THEY CAN BE RESTORED TO THEIR ORIGINAL MINT CONDITION - IF - AND THIS IS THE KEY - IF THEIR TEACHERS AND PARENTS SEE THEIR ABILITY, BELIEVE IN IT, EXPECT IT TO OPERATE.

I CANNOT PUT TOO MUCH STRESS ON THIS POINT. AS PSYCHOLOGIST KENNETH CLARK HAS SAID, "IF A CHILD FEELS HE UNEDUCABLE, HE WILL BE UNEDUCABLE." AND I WOULD ADD, "IF HE FEELS HE CAN LEARN, HE CAN LEARN."

NEGLECT OF THAT SIMPLE, OBVIOUS TRUTH CAN AND DOES DESTROY MANY CHILDRENS' CHANCE TO LEARN. IT IS AT THE HEART OF THE TRAGIC STATISTICS WHICH TELL US THAT NEARLY 1½ MILLION AMERICANS - RESIDENTS OF THE WEALTHIEST NATION ON EARTH - CANNOT READ AT ALL - AND THAT HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS OF OTHERS READ TOO POORLY TO HOLD EVEN ENTRY-LEVEL JOBS.

BUT
BELIEVING IN THE ABILITY OUR OUR STUDENTS ALONE WILL NOT REVERSE THESE STATISTICS IN THE UNITED STATES - OR IN OTHER COUNTRIES WHERE THEY ARE FAR MORE ALARMING.

BEGINNING WITH FAITH IN CHILDREN'S ABILITY TO LEARN, WE MUST DEVELOP NEW TECHNIQUES TO TEACH THE DIVERSE STUDENT BODIES OF THE 1980'S. OBVIOUSLY THE SAME METHODS THAT SUCCEEDED WITH THE WELL-PREPARED AND MOTIVATED TINY MINORITY OF STUDENTS WE EDUCATED YESTERDAY WILL NOT SUCCEED WITH THE POORLY PREPARED AND LARGELY UNMOTIVATED MULTITUDES IN OUR SCHOOLS TODAY.

OUR FIRST TASK IS OFTEN TO HELP THESE STUDENTS DEVELOP THEIR DESIRE TO READ. THE QUESTION IS "HOW?".

I RECENTLY HAD THE PLEASURE OF DISCUSSING THAT QUESTION WITH AN EXPERT ON THE SUBJECT OF MOTIVATING DEPRIVED CHILDREN TO LEARN - A TEACHER IN AN UNGRADED CLASS OF CHILDREN ACHIEVING IN THE BOTTOM QUARTILE ON READING TESTS.

SHE TOLD ME, "ALMOST ALL OF MY CHILDREN COULD BE DESCRIBED AS DISCOURAGED, ALTHOUGH THIS IS SHOWN IN MANY WAYS: SOME PRETEND THEY DON'T CARE; OTHERS BECOME CLASS SHOW-OFFS TO COVER UP THEIR 'FAILURE.' SOME ARE LIKE THE QUIET MOUSE HIDING IN SOME CORNER, HOPING THE TEACHER WILL NOT CALL ON THEM. OTHERS ARE OFTEN IN TEARS; SOME FEIGN ILLNESS; SOME 'CUT' SCHOOL; OTHERS BECOME FIGHTERS OR USERS OF BAD LANGUAGE. A FEW ARE DESTRUCTIVE AND SOME BECOME 'DAY DREAMERS.'"

THEN THAT WONDERFUL TEACHER ADDED: "NONE OF MY CHILDREN HAS BEEN DIAGNOSED AS BEING MENTALLY RETARDED OR EMOTIONALLY HANDICAPPED. THEY ARE BEHIND THE CLASS. THEY NEED HELP AND LOVE. WHAT COULD BE A GREATER CHALLENGE TO A TEACHER? I HAVE A WONDERFUL JOB - CHILDREN WHO NEED ME, A PLACE WHERE I CAN HAVE THE TIME AND PRIVACY TO FIND OUT WHAT THEIR PROBLEMS ARE, BEAUTIFUL MATERIALS TO HELP ME SOLVE AND FILL THEIR EDUCATIONAL NEEDS, TIME TO REALLY KNOW EACH ONE OF MY CHILDREN AS A PERSON, NOT JUST AS A MEMBER OF A GROUP."

THAT ATTITUDE HAS LED THAT TEACHER, AND OTHERS LIKE HER, TO SEARCH THEIR INTUITION, THEIR EXPERIENCE AND THEIR TRAINING TO FIND WAYS TO OPEN STUDENTS' MINDS, TO UNCOVER THEIR ABILITY AND THEIR INTEREST IN LEARNING.

MANY OF THESE DEDICATED PROFESSIONALS HAVE WRITTEN AND SPOKEN ABOUT WHAT <u>WORKS</u> IN THEIR CLASSROOMS.

IN OAKLAND'S PUBLIC SCHOOLS, WE STUDY AND THEN DISSEMINATE THIS INFORMATION WIDELY - AND WE APPLY IT IN OUR DISTRICT-WIDE EDUCATION POLICIES AND IN OUR CLASSROOMS.

BASED ON THIS FIRST-HAND RESEARCH, WE HAVE MADE READING OUR TOP PRIORITY - BECAUSE THOSE ON THE FRONT LINE, OUR TEACHERS, HAVE TOLD US THAT THAT IS WHERE IT BELONGS.

WE HAVE SET DEMANDING LEARNING STANDARDS FOR EACH GRADE LEVEL, FOR PROMOTION AND FOR GRADUATION - AND WE HAVE ALLOCATED MORE TIME, MONEY AND PERSONNEL TO THE READING PROGRAM - EVEN AT THE EXPENSE OF OTHER ACTIVITIES - TO SUPPORT STUDENTS IN MEETING THESE HIGHER EXPECTATIONS.

OF COURSE, WE PUT OUR GREATEST ENERGY INTO GETTING STUDENTS INTERESTED IN HELPING THEMSELVES, BECAUSE WE KNOW THAT AUTHOR FRANK JENNINGS WAS RIGHT WHEN HE WROTE, "THERE IS MAGIC IN THE BOOK, BUT IT IS LIKE THE MAGIC OF A SAFETY MATCH. IT WORKS ONLY WHEN IT STRIKES THE ROUGH SURFACE OF INTEREST."

INTEREST, AS ALL OF YOU KNOW SO WELL, IS INVARIABLY THE SOURCE OF SUCCESSFUL LEARNING. WHEN PEOPLE, OF ANY AGE, WANT TO LEARN, THEY LEARN. WHEN THEY ARE PREACHED AT, LECTURED, PUT IN SETTINGS WHERE THEY FAIL AND FEEL STUPID AGAIN AND AGAIN - THEY REJECT THE WHOLE SYSTEM OF EDUCATION.

IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS, THIS INSENSITIVE APPROACH CAN CREATE THE ASTOUNDING SITUATION WHERE THE SAME CHILD WHO MASTERED THE AWESOMELY COMPLEX TASKS OF LEARNING TO WALK AND TO SPEAK THOUSANDS OF WORDS - VIRTUALLY BY HIMSELF - CANNOT BE TAUGHT TO READ THE 45 SOUNDS OF SPOKEN ENGLISH AND THE 380 SIGNS OF WRITTEN ENGLISH - BECAUSE HE HAS ALREADY LEARNED THE PARALYZING LESSON THAT HE IS A FAILURE.

TO REVERSE THAT MESSAGE, WE USE A VARIETY OF TECHNIQUES, SET IN WHAT I LIKE TO CALL A "CONTEXT OF CONCERN." I WANT TO DESCRIBE THESE METHODS TO YOU BRIEFLY, BECAUSE I THINK THEY ARE UNIVERSALLY APPLICABLE.

FIRST, WITH SO-CALLED "DISADVANTAGED" STUDENTS, WE PROVIDE AS WIDE A VARIETY OF LIFE EXPERIENCES AS POSSIBLE - ESPECIALLY IN THE LOWER GRADES. SOME OF THESE CHILDREN HAVE NEVER TRAVELLED MORE THAN A FEW BLOCKS FROM THEIR INNER CITY HOMES. MANY HAVE NEVER BEEN INSIDE A LIBRARY OR A MUSEUM, AND THEY PROBABLY HAVEN'T SEEN A FARM, A WOODS - OR EVEN THE OCEAN A FEW MILES FROM THEIR HOMES.

IT IS UP TO US TO ENLARGE THEIR BASE OF EXPERIENCE WITH FIELD TRIPS, STORYTELLING, DISCUSSIONS - FOR WE KNOW THAT THEY WILL ONLY BE ABLE TO CONCEPTUALIZE AND INTERPRET SYMBOLS BASED ON THEIR OWN EXPERIENCE, THAT THEY CAN ONLY READ BOOKS AFTER THEY HAVE LEARNED TO READ THE WORLD AROUND THEM.

THEN, WE CONTINUOUSLY INDIVIDUALIZE OUR TEACHING, EVEN IF THAT MEANS TEACHING THE ALPHABET TO A HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT OR MAKING EVERY HIGH SCHOOL TEACHER OF EVERY SUBJECT A PART-TIME READING TEACHER.

WE SET REACHABLE GOALS WITH STUDENTS. AND WHEN THEY SUCCEED, WE REWARD THEM SHAMELESSLY - WITH PUBLIC AND PRIVATE WORDS OF PRAISE, WITH CERTIFICATES, AND SOMETIMES EVEN WITH SMALL GIFTS.

AS SUCCESS BEGINS TO GIVE BIRTH TO INTEREST, WE ESTABLISH FIRM, YET FRIENDLY RULES CLASSROOM DISCIPLINE - AND WE ENFORCE THOSE RULES.

WE REMAIN ACUTELY AWARE OF THE BARRIERS TO OUR STUDENTS' PROGRESS, AND WE TRY TO REMOVE THEM ONE BY ONE. FOR EXAMPLE, SOME TEACHERS INTEGRATE FREQUENT PHYSICAL ACTIVITY INTO THEIR DAILY PROGRAMS, BECAUSE THEIR STUDENTS ARE UNACCUSTOMED TO SITTING QUIETLY FOR LONG PERIODS OF TIME. THEY ARE FLEXIBLE ENOUGH TO ABANDON, SHORTEN OR REVISE ASSIGNMENTS THAT ARE CLEARLY INAPPROPRIATE. THEY

ALLOW ADEQUATE TIME FOR STUDENTS TO COMPLETE THEIR WORK. THEY EVEN TRY TO FIND WAYS TO MAKE LEARNING FUN.

WE ALSO ENCOURAGE OUR TEACHERS TO PROVIDE A VARIETY OF MATERIALS TO ACCOMMODATE THE RANGE OF INTERESTS, CULTURAL BACKGROUNDS AND LEARNING STYLES OF THEIR STUDENTS. A TEACHER MUST NOTICE AND RESPOND TO THE FACT THAT ETHEL LOVES SHORT STORIES AND READS QUICKLY; THAT LARGE BOOKS AND LENGTHY STORIES BORE HER - THAT NATHAN FINDS AUTO MECHANICS MAGAZINES OF GREAT INTEREST - THAT GARY IS INTRIGUED WITH RESEARCH, EXPECIALLY ABOUT FOREIGN COUNTRIES AND USES THE REFERENCE BOOKS OFTEN - THAT STELLA ENJOYS THE CLASSIFIED SECTION OF THE NEWSPAPER, BECAUSE HER FAMILY IS LOOKING FOR A HOME TO BUY.

IN SHORT, IT IS ESSENTIAL, AS WE HAVE DISCOVERED AT THIS CONFERENCE, TO DO A GOOD JOB OF MATCHING THE READER WITH THE TEXT.

AND WE CONSTANTLY REMIND OUR TEACHERS THAT READING IS NOT AN ISOLATED SKILL, THAT IT IS CLOSELY INTERTWINED WITH THE COMPANION SKILLS OF LISTENING, SPEAKING AND WRITING. STUDENTS ARE GIVEN FREQUENT OPPORTUNITIES TO CONVERSE IN CLASS, TO EXCHANGE IDEAS WITH THEIR PEERS, TO WRITE STORIES, LETTERS, ESSAYS, TO READ THEIR OWN WORDS - TO DISCOVER, WITH WONDER AND DELIGHT, THE "LARGE DISCOURSE" WITHIN THEMSELVES.

THOUGH OUR EMPHASIS IS ON THESE BASIC SKILLS, WE DO NOT NEGLECT THE ARTS, MUSIC - OR PHYSICAL EDUCATION - ALL OF WHICH GIVE SOME STUDENTS THE CRUCIAL CHANCE TO SUCCEED AND TO DISCOVER THEIR TASTE FOR LEARNING.

AS STUDENTS RESPOND TO ALL OF THIS ENCOURAGEMENT, WE TEST THEM TO SHOW THEM HOW THEY ARE DOING IN COMPARISON WITH THEIR OWN EARLIER WORK AND WITH OTHER STUDENTS ON THEIR GRADE LEVEL.

I AM PARTICULARLY PROUD TO TELL YOU THAT LAST YEAR OUR STUDENTS' SCORES IMPROVED IN EVERY GRADE, BRINGING THEM CLOSE TO NATIONAL NORMS AND FAR BEYOND THEIR PREVIOUS LEVELS OF ACHIEVEMENT.

WHILE TEACHERS, WITH THEIR STUDENTS' COOPERATION, ARE LARGELY RESPONSIBLE FOR THESE GAINS, THEY DO NEED AND GET MANY SUPPORTS FROM OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOM.

EVERY SCHOOL EMPLOYEE, FROM CUSTODIANS AND CAFETERIA WORKERS TO TOP ADMINISTRATORS, KNOWS THE DISTRICT'S GOALS AND HAS SOME RESPONSIBILITY FOR HELPING STUDENTS TO FULFILL THEM. FOR EXAMPLE, WE HAVE HAD EXCELLENT COOPERATION FROM OUR NON-TEACHING STAFF IN MAKING OUR ANTI-TRUANCY AND ANTI-VANDALISM PROGRAMS WORK - AND WORK WELL.

OUR DISTRICT ALSO ARRANGES, SPONSORS AND ENCOURAGES AS MUCH PARENT PARTICIPATION IN EDUCATION PROGRAMS AS POSSIBLE. WE ENLIST COMMUNITY MEMBERS TO SERVE ON OUR ADVISORY COMMITTEES, AND WE HOLD CLASSES AND WORKSHOPS TO TEACH THEM HOW TO HELP THEIR CHILDREN LEARN.

WE URGE PARENTS TO PROVIDE THEIR CHILDREN WITH QUIET, WELL-LIT PLACES TO STUDY, TO LIMIT TELEVISION AND RADIO TIME - AND, MOST IMPORTANTLY, TO TALK WITH THEIR CHILDREN, LISTEN TO THEM, TAKE THEM PLACES.

LOCAL INDUSTRIES ARE CONTRIBUTING THEIR SHARE TOO, BY SPONSORING SUCH ACTIVITIES AS READING LABS AT VARIOUS SCHOOLS. MANY OF THEM DONATE THOUSANDS OF DOLLARS AND MUCH VALUABLE TIME THROUGH OUR UNIQUE ADOPT-A-SCHOOL PROJECT.

WE ALSO MAKE USE OF EVERY AVAILABLE GOVERNMENTAL RESOURCE FROM THE NATIONAL RIGHT TO READ PROJECT, WHICH I ONCE ADMINISTERED, TO CALIFORNIA'S OWN SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM AND MANY OTHER SCHOOL AID PROGRAMS.

EVEN FAMOUS AMERICANS FROM ACROSS THE COUNTRY ARE BROUGHT INTO OAKAND'S SCHOOLS TO MAKE OUR INSTRUCTIONAL OFFERINGS RICHER AND MORE EFFECTIVE. UNDER OUR VISITING ARTISTS AND SCHOLARS PROGRAM, THESE NOTABLES FREQUENTLY VISIT SCHOOLS TO TALK WITH AND INSPIRE STUDENTS.

IN JUST THE PAST FEW MONTHS, OUR STUDENTS HAVE MET VERNON JORDAN, THE NATIONAL PRESIDENT OF THE URBAN LEAGUE; ROSA PARKS, THE COURAGEOUS WOMAN WHOSE ACTIONS SPARKED OUR COUNTRY'S CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT; ACTRESS JANE FONDA; AND AMERICA'S "FIRST LADY," ROSALYNN CARTER.

WHEN STUDENTS HEAR FIRST-HAND, AS THEY DID FROM ANOTHER ARTIST/SCHOLAR, AUTHOR JAMES BALDWIN, THAT READING IS INVALUABLE - THEY BELIEVE IT! BALDWIN TOLD THEM, "YOU THINK YOUR PAIN AND YOUR HEARTBREAK ARE UNPRECEDENTED IN THE HISTORY OF THE WORLD, BUT THEN YOU READ. IT WAS BOOKS THAT TAUGHT ME THAT THE THINGS THAT TORMENTED ME MOST WERE THE VERY THINGS THAT CONNECTED ME WITH ALL THE PEOPLE WHO WERE ALIVE OR WHO HAD EVER BEEN ALIVE."

I DIDN'T CONDUCT ANY SURVEYS, BUT I'D BE WILLING TO BET THAT OUR LIBRARY CIRCULATION ROSE SUBSTANTIALLY AFTER THAT PARTICULAR APPEARANCE.

BUT EVEN WHEN WE DO SUCCEED IN MOTIVATING STUDENTS TO READ, IN TEACHING THEM TO ENJOY READING AND TO READ WELL, OUR JOB AS

PUBLIC SCHOOL EDUCATORS IS NOT COMPLETE - NOT IN AN AREA LIKE OAKLAND WHERE JOBS ARE THE SCARCEST AND MOST VALUED COMMODITY.

IT'S NOT ENOUGH TO KNOW HOW TO READ A NEWSPAPER ADVERTISEMENT FOR A JOB, TO FILL OUT AN APPLICATION, TO SPEAK WELL AT AN INTERVIEW. OUR STUDENTS MUST ALSO GRADUATE WITH SPECIFIC WORK SKILLS IF THEY ARE TO FIND EMPLOYMENT.

SO OUR READING PROGRAM IN THE UPPER GRADES IS OFTEN COORDINATED WITH CAREER EDUCATION AND EVEN WITH WORK EXPERIENCE. ONE VERY SUCCESSFUL PROJECT WE ARE RUNNING THIS SUMMER IN COOPERATION WITH THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA AT BERKELEY AND THE KAISER ALUMINUM CORPORATION PUTS STUDENTS IN ACADEMIC CLASSES FOR HALF OF EACH DAY AND IN JOBS WHERE THEY CAN APPLY WHAT THEY HAVE LEARNED FOR THE OTHER HALF. IN THOSE CLASSROOMS, NO ONE HAS TO SUPPLY ARTIFICIAL INCENTIVES FOR READING.

AT EVERY LEVEL - FROM PRE-SCHOOL THROUGH HIGH SCHOOL - WE STRIVE TO MAKE OUR READING PROGRAM FIT THE ASPIRATIONS AND NEEDS OF STUDENTS. I HAVE TOLD YOU HOW WE SOMETIMES SUCCEED IN THAT ENDEAVOR, BUT I MUST ALSO TELL YOU THAT , IN SPITE OF OUR BEST EFFORTS, WE ALSO FAIL FAR TOO OFTEN - AND EACH OF OUR FAILURES IS A LIFE THAT WILL NOT BE LIVED TO ITS FULLEST.

WHAT EXACTLY DO THOSE WORDS MEAN IN HUMAN TERMS? I HAVE OFTEN TRIED TO EXPERIENCE FOR MYSELF WHAT IT WOULD BE LIKE NOT TO BE ABLE TO READ, SO I COULD IDENTIFY WITH AND FIND BETTER WAYS TO REACH NON-READERS.

AND JUST AS SEEING "HAMLET" TAUGHT ME WHAT READING CAN BE AT ITS BEST, SO ANOTHER PERSONAL EXPERIENCE GAVE ME A GLIMPSE INTO THE WORLD OF THE NON-READER.

RECENTLY A FRIEND WHO IS A MUSIC TEACHER SUGGESTED THAT I LEARN TO PLAY SOME DUETS WITH HER ON THE RECORDER. "IT'S SO SIMPLE," SHE SAID. "I CAN TEACH KINDERGARTENERS WITH NO PREVIOUS MUSIC TRAINING TO PLAY A SONG AT THEIR FIRST LESSON."

SO I TRIED - EAGERLY AND OPTIMISTICALLY AT FIRST. BUT THEN I DIDN'T MAKE THE PROGRESS I EXPECTED. I FOUND IT WAS VERY DIFFICULT FOR ME TO READ THE NOTES, COUNT AND PRODUCE A SOUND ALL AT ONCE.

MY MIND SEEMED TO GRIND TO A HALT. I FELT A KIND OF FEAR - AND A BLOCK TO GOING ON THAT WAS ALMOST PHYSICAL.

I LAUGHED NERVOUSLY, SUGGESTED THAT WE DO SOMETHING ELSE, RESISTED EVERY EFFORT MY NOW-FRUSTRATED FRIEND MADE TO GET ME ON THE TRACK.

THE MORE I WITHDREW, THE MORE SHE "INSTRUCTED," BATHING ME IN SUCH A SEA OF WORDS THAT I FELT LIKE I WAS DROWNING.

ALL THIS HAPPENED IN JUST A BRIEF TIME - PERHAPS AN HOUR. BUT IT WAS LONG ENOUGH TO TAKE ME THROUGH ALL THE AGONY OF WHAT IT IS LIKE TO BE "TAUGHT" IN A WAY THAT DENIES YOUR NEEDS, THAT DOES NOT ALLOW YOU THE TIME, THE SPACE AND THE ATMOSPHERE TO FIT THE NEW INFORMATION INTO WHAT YOU ALREADY KNOW.

AFTER THAT PAINFUL LESSON, I TOOK THE RECORDER HOME AND SIMPLY PLAYED WITH IT, I GOT USED TO HOW IT FELT, HOW IT WAS CONSTRUCTED, THE SOUNDS IT COULD MAKE. I LISTENED TO A TAPE OF RECORDER MUSIC AND EXPERIMENTED WITH CREATING A TUNE OF MY OWN.

SOON I BECAME CURIOUS ABOUT HOW TO REPRODUCE THE NOTES ON THE SHEET MUSIC AND STUDIED A MANUAL THAT DESCRIBED FINGER PLACEMENT. TO MY SURPRISE AND DELIGHT, I AT LAST EQUALLED THOSE FAST-LEARNING KINDERGARTENERS' ABILITY TO PLAY A SIMPLE TUNE.

AT THAT MOMENT, I "DISCOVERED" THE TRUTH ONCE EXPRESSED SO BEAUTIFULLY BY POET RALPH WALDO EMERSON. "WHAT IS TRUE IN YOUR PRIVATE HEART," HE WROTE, "IS TRUE FOR ALL MEN."

WHAT I NEEDED IN ORDER TO LEARN, WHAT I WANTED, WHAT I FELT WERE THE SAME THINGS MY STUDENTS NEED AND WANT AND FEEL.

THE DIFFERENCE IS THAT FOR THOSE WHO ARE DISADVANTAGED MY WAY OF FINALLY LEARNING IS NOT REALLY AN OPTION AT ALL. THEY DO NOT HAVE THE RECORDERS - OR THE BOOKS - OR THE EXPERIENCES WITH WHICH TO TEACH THEMSELVES. BEYOND A POINT, THEY CANNOT INVENT THEIR OWN EDUCATION, BECAUSE THEY LACK THE ESSENTIAL SKILLS.

THAT, THEN IS THE CHALLENGE FOR READING TEACHERS AND FOR ALL EDUCATORS IN THIS DECADE OF THE 80'S - TO LOOK INTO OUR HUMAN EXPERIENCE TO DISCOVER HOW WE - AND OTHERS - LEARN AND HOW WE - AND THEY - DO NOT LEARN - AND THEN TO FASHION THAT INFORMATION AND INSIGHT INTO PRACTICAL TOOLS FOR TEACHING.

ALL OF US HERE HAVE STUDIED AND READ, FILLED OUR NOTEBOOKS AND OUR BRAINS WITH EVERY KIND OF "EXPERTISE" ON HOW TO TEACH READING. WHAT WE MUST NOW ADD TO THAT STOREHOUSE OF KNOWLEDGE IS RESPECT - PERHAPS EVEN LOVE - FOR OUR STUDENTS - FOR THEIR PRECIOUS, UNIQUE AND UNDUPLICATABLE POTENTIAL TO BECOME THEMSELVES - PARTLY BY READING WHAT HAS BEEN WRITTEN BY THOSE WHO LIVED BEFORE THEM.

WE WILL TRULY BECOME TEACHERS WHEN WE CAN CELEBRATE OUR STUDENTS' CAPABILITIES - AND OUR OWN - AS HAMLET DID IN HIS FAMED EXCHANGE WITH ROSENCRANTZ AND GUILDERSTERN:

"WHAT A PIECE OF WORK IS MAN, HOW NOBLE IN REASON, HOW INFINITE IN FACULTIES, IN FORM AND MOVING HOW EXPRESS AND ADMIRABLE, IN ACTION HOW LIKE AN ANGEL, IN APPREHENSION HOW LIKE A GOD - THE BEAUTY OF THE WORLD, THE PARAGON OF ANIMALS!"

THAT IS THE MATERIAL WE HAVE TO WORK WITH. OURS IS TRULY THE GREATEST PRIVILEGE AND THE GREATEST CHALLENGE ON EARTH!